



AMERICAN FEDERATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, AFL-CIO

Dr. Everett B. Kelley
National Secretary-Treasurer

J. David Cox, Sr.
National President

Jeremy A. Lannan
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The Honorable Mark Takano
Chairman
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
B234 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Dr. Phil Roe
Ranking Member
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
3460 O'Neill House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20024

June 18, 2019

Dear Chairman Takano, Ranking Member Roe, Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the more than 700,000 federal and D.C. government employees represented by the American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO (AFGE), including the 260,000 frontline Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) employees represented by our National VA Council (NVAC), I write to register strong opposition to H.R. 3083, the "AIR Acceleration Act," a bill that would authorize the Asset and Infrastructure Review Commission to begin its operations on an earlier schedule than that which was included in the VA Mission Act.

This Mission Act's provision for this Commission was modeled on the Defense Department's Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process, and there has never been any doubt that its purpose is to reduce the number of VA medical centers and clinics. AFGE strongly opposed this section of the Mission Act and opposes accelerating the dismantlement of VA through H.R. 3083.

From the beginning of the debate surrounding the MISSION Act, AFGE has warned against the negative consequences that closing VA facilities will have on patient care and the capacity of VA to meet veterans' demand for services. Make no mistake: the Asset and Infrastructure Review Commission will not result in improved infrastructure, it will serve to facilitate the closure of VA facilities.

Once the closures begin, veterans will no longer have the "choice" of VA's world-class integrated healthcare system. Their only choice will be private care. Privatized care will be the only care.

A closure commission for VA takes away Congressional responsibility – and authority – for VA's infrastructure decisions. The default position is that the Commission's recommendations will advance unless Congress explicitly overrides a Commission



decision. It is unconscionable to leave the future of VA hospitals and clinics – whether they will be built, renovated, or closed and sold – to an unelected group of political appointees. To allow H.R. 3083 to become law would be a terrible abdication of responsibility on the part of the Congress.

Please also be aware that BRAC-style closures do not result in cost savings. In particular, when healthcare provided in VA facilities is replaced by care purchased from providers in the private sector, costs will rise substantially. Costly and unaccountable private care does not meet the promises our nation has made to veterans.

In the strongest possible terms, AFGE urges you to oppose H.R. 3083. We ask instead that the Committee focus its attention toward requiring the VA to fully staff its hospitals and clinics and fill its more than 50,000 open positions so that veterans can obtain the world-class, veteran-centric care at the VA that they have earned. If you have questions regarding AFGE's position on H.R. 3083, please contact Matt Sowards at Matt.Sowards@afge.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. David Cox, Sr.", written in a cursive style.

J. David Cox, Sr.
National President